UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.151/PC/45
19 July 1991

Original: ENGLISH

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
Third session
Geneva, 12 August - 4 September 1991
Plenary session
Item 2 C of the provisional agenda

POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference

1. The Preparatory Committee, at its second session, in decision A/CONF.151/PC/L.36, requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to continue work on cross-sectoral issues and develop proposals in greater depth for the third session of the Preparatory Committee. The present document takes account of the reports specially prepared for UNCED by FAO, ILO, UNFPA, IFAD and those prepared by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) for the Swedish International Development Authority and UNDP. 1/ In addition, it takes into account the recommendations of the UNCED/UNICEF/UNFPA Symposium "Women and Children First" as well as the various inputs received by UNCED from indigenous groups and NGOs.

2. The analysis presented in the document on Poverty and Environmental Degradation discussed at the second session of the Preparatory Committee (A/CONF.151/PC/15) had focused attention on the macro-economic context within which development is taking place, global demographic trends and access to means of livelihood and sustenance. As was argued in that document, international initiatives for arresting the reverse transfer of resources, providing external assistance and structuring technical cooperation to build human and national capabilities, along with national policy framework that ensures macro-economic stability, promote efficiency in the use of resources and reduces vulnerability to internal and external stress, are especially

GE.91-61976/3533B

important for poverty alleviation and human development. This paper does not focus on these broader issues of development policy and deals essentially with more specific interventions directed at the redressal of poverty and unemployment and the alleviation of demographic pressures.

WHO ARE THE POOR?

3. An income level below which minimum nutrition and essential non-food requirements are not affordable constitutes poverty. Measured in terms of dollars, the world has 157 billionaires, some 2 million millionaires and more than 1.5 billion people living in wretched poverty, garbage dumps, shanty towns or resourceless rural areas. But poverty is far more than an economic condition. It extends to all aspects of individual life: physical weakness and sickness, no access to most essential services, lack of information, limited control over resources, subordination to and exploitation by higher social and economic power, extreme vulnerability to sudden stress, insecurity in the face of changing circumstances, erosion of human dignity and self-respect, social and cultural marginalization. The poor are often different in color, socio-ethnic group, tribe or religion from the dominant wealthy groups. Powerlessness, in industrialized and developing countries alike, is one of the most dominant characteristics of destitution. The poor lack access to centers of influence and are ill represented in the government. In many countries, there are no appropriate institutions for mobilizing the interests of the poor, be they political parties or NGO's. The consequence of this is the inability of the poor to take initiatives to improve their welfare without outside support, even though what is required may be very modest.

4. The poor are more likely to be female than male, particularly in urban areas. There is no doubt that life is harsher for poor women than for poor men. They are paid less than men and work more, one to three additional hours each day. They are less educated and bear greater responsibilities for the rearing of their children. Female headed households are highly represented among poor households. But the biggest single group of poor is children whose prospects are even worse than for their parents. Two-thirds of the world's absolute poor are under the age of 15. A significant proportion of them is physically stunted and mentally impaired as a result of chronic hunger during the critical age of 6 months to 2 years. In 1990, it was estimated that more than 300 million children under 14 years were serving as cheap labor in mines, cottage and industrial enterprises all over the world, in very unhealthy conditions, while most of the time their fathers were unemployed. 2/ Despite rapid urbanization and growing urban poverty, the majority of the poor, for the moment, still live in rural areas.

5. The poor are estimated to comprise 25 per cent of the total population in Asia, 62 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 28 per cent in North Africa and the Middle East and 35 per cent in Latin America. On the whole, one person out of four lives in poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, small holders constitute the major part of rural poor in most countries. In Asia, the poor include the landless and the near landless - who constitute the largest sub-group - workers, households engaged in specific trades and artisanal fishermen. In the Near East, the poor are landless laborers, small-holders, pastoralists, artisanal fishermen and women. The people with the lowest income are the

nomads and agropastoralists who practice dryland farming. In Latin America and the Caribbean, most of the poor are found in urban areas reflecting the accelerated urbanization process underway in the region. In industrialized countries, poverty, although far less severe, has increased during the eighties, particularly in the USA, the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe. 3/

6. The rural poor are increasingly pushed either to the cities or to poorer land. They tend to be concentrated in fragile regions where land is least productive and tenure rights least secure: arid and semi-arid lands, mountains slopes, tropical forests. The proportion of the poor living on marginal or fragile land is estimated at 47 per cent; at today's continuing rapid rates of population growth and densities, the preservation of these fragile environments is a huge challenge.

THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY

7. Poverty exists in industrialized and less developed countries, although with a fundamental difference: in industrialized countries redistributing income would leave everyone comparatively well off; in less developed countries it would leave everyone poor, 3/ thus indicating that the lack of sufficient per capita economic growth is an important reason for the pervasiveness of poverty. The reasons for poverty lie both in domestic constraints and policy deficiencies and in international economic processes which have contributed to oppressive debt burdens, high interest rates, falling export prices, limitations on access to markets, and other economic processes affecting negatively the capacity of these countries to develop and raise the standard of living of their growing populations. In industrialized countries, poverty results mainly from a lack of appropriate domestic economic and social policies.

8. In terms of wealth, there is a wide gap between nations. Seventy-seven per cent of the world's population earn a mere 15 per cent of its income. Although several developing countries have achieved significant economic growth during the last decade, poverty remains a major problem. Documented case studies confirm that, at the national level, the poor have borne the brunt of economic hardships. Disparities of income have widened since the early seventies, reversing earlier improvements. In many developing countries, national budgets have tended to favor industrial over rural development and military over social expenditures. 4/ At the same time aid for development assistance for poverty related activities has fallen well short of need. Within sectors resources are distributed in a manner that could increase inequalities: roads and irrigation canals tend to be built in the more prosperous regions first, reinforcing their initial economic advantages; electricity and piped drinking water tend to be concentrated in areas of cities where residents own their homes; higher education receives disproportionately more money than primary education.

Urban poverty

9. In the last 15 years, the number of urban poor has increased by 81 per cent in Africa and 55 per cent in Asia. In Latin America, the number of urban poor have more than doubled. 5/ Basic services are totally inadequate: the poor lack the most elementary infrastructures which would

enable them to preserve their immediate environment: clean water, sewage systems, garbage removal, etc. There is a need for new, low-cost solutions to these problems.

10. The urban poor suffer environmental abuses and pollution caused by others. The disproportionate exposure of the poor to pollution and hazardous material has gone almost unmeasured in developing countries. A study of the United States economy indicates that three-fourths of hazardous waste landfills in the southeast are in low-income neighborhoods, and more than half of all Afro-Americans and Hispanic-Americans live in communities with at least one toxic waste site. 3/ Migrants working on farms, especially women, are exposed more than others to toxic pesticides which have been proven to create miscarriages or birth deformities.

11. High population growth rates and rural-urban migration which prevail in developing countries will continue to place a great stress on cities, and on their already over taxed infrastructures and facilities. Because cities have a great role to play in offering non-farm employment, in alleviating the pressure on land, in generating wealth, in widening the national market, and in creating a socio-economic context favorable to the demographic transition, they need to receive much more attention from policy-makers, development planners and donor agencies than they do now. Development policies should aim at establishing a better urban environment for the poor and providing them with greater economic and social opportunities. In the framework of sustainable livelihoods, the urban poor need to be a major target group. Among them, women who migrate and women who are heads of households need attention because they tend to be more marginalized and vulnerable than other sub-groups.

Rural poverty

12. Although rural poverty can be seen from different points of view, landlessness appears to be its major feature. Because the poor are resourceless, their prospects for income and employment are often measured in terms of the fertility and the productivity of their physical environment. In a context of land degradation, soil erosion, deforestation, desertification and scarcity of freshwater, the poor are in danger of becoming poorer as their environment continue to degrade. Precisely because they are poor and so bound up in the day-to-day struggle to survive that they cannot afford the labour or the foregone production for the conservation measures that would help preserve their resources. Furthermore, this often takes place in a context where the technological responses and the enabling socio-economic environment for these responses are lacking. At another level, the development process tends to exclude the poor through policies which reinforce their marginalization and dependence.

13. Population pressure is a major factor which aggravates rural poverty. In order to meet increasing demands for food, fuelwood, water and other essential resources required by increasing populations, the poor are forced either to increase exploitation of available land, overusing it, or expand the surface of land under cultivation (when there is land available), or when there is no other solution, move on to even more marginal lands, thus accelerating the degradation of already fragile ecosystems. Population growth, and its various

implications, changes in population density and internal distribution, has greatly influenced land use patterns and agricultural production in ways which are associated with the deterioration of the quality of the land. The increase of cultivated land, the clearing of new lands by migrants, the fragmentation of landholdings to a size that can no longer support a large family, soil erosion, reduction in fallow times, increased cropping intensity and land conflicts are found to be linked, in an increasing number of cases, with population pressures. 6/

THE LINKAGES BETWEEN POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

14. Looking at the linkages between poverty, environmental degradation, population trends and development, there are two different sets of problems which should not be confused. One is the influence of population on consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources. In this respect, the relatively small population in the industrialized countries continues to have by far the greater impact though of course, as they develop, low income countries will represent an increasing amount and an increasing proportion of world consumption. The other major problem is that rapid population growth tends to both strangle the infrastructure and do great damage to the resource-base of a country. The fast-growing populations of developing countries have for the moment a limited influence on global environment issues but their own development is made more difficult by rapid population growth. As demographic pressure builds and mushrooming demands are made to satisfy basic needs, consumption, income and food security, there is every reason to anticipate depletion and degradation of the resource base in these countries. Both groups of countries will have to redesign their futures to aim for adequate standards of living with radically less per capita consumption of environment-damaging goods by the higher income groups.

15. Given the variety of factors contributing to environmental degradation at the global, regional, national or local level, it would be an oversimplification to say that poverty is the only cause of environmental degradation. In reality, there seem to be different types of poverty/environment linkages namely where: poverty is a major underlying factor; poverty is a proximate cause of environmental degradation but failure of policies, markets and institutions are the major underlying causes; the opposite of poverty, wealth - or a certain type of development - is the primary cause of environmental degradation. In the latter case, poverty is exacerbated as a result. The same distinction can be made about population growth. There are cases where population pressure leads directly to environmental degradation and increased poverty, cases where it is a proximate cause, and other cases where the causes of both poverty and environmental degradation are found in economic and social policies, with population growth therefore playing the role of an exacerbating factor.

16. The population and natural resources equation cannot be treated as a one-to-one relationship. According to some scientists, how population pressures affect natural resources in a certain region depends on the following five interacting variables, which themselves vary significantly according to local policies and to the level of socio-economic development of the region:

- the absolute number of people using the resources;
- the level of the local populations consumption of environment-sensitive goods;
- the type of practices used to harvest or protect resources;
- the extent exports result in loss of the natural resource base;
- the resilience of nature itself.

In global terms, the rate of natural resource consumption depends on the first three variables, while the added element of nature's resilience will determine the ultimate rate of resource depletion. 7/

17. In most developing countries, the present demographic trends constitute an additional constraint to sustainable development at the national and household levels: population growth rates and dependency rates are high. Developing countries have yet to complete the main phase of their massive population growth: between 1950 and 1985 they increased by about 2 billion people, whereas between 1985 and 2025 the increase is estimated to be about 3.5 billion. 8/ In this period, the population of developing countries will again more than double.

18. For total developing world, the number of people working or seeking work in 1990 was estimated to be 1.8 billion; of these, the total unemployed and underemployed exceeded half a billion persons, or almost as many as the entire workforce of the industrialized world. Because of the sheer increase in human numbers, the 1990 workforce is projected to grow to 2.1 billion in 2000 and 3.1 billion in 2025. Every year during the 1990s, the developing countries must create an average of 30 million new jobs just to prevent unemployment from growing worse. Latin America must create a number of jobs equal to 230 per cent of what the United States achieved during the past two decades. In sub-Saharan Africa, unemployment and underemployment run at a level of at least 40 per cent. The region will have to create annually 6 million jobs during the 1990s and 10 million throughout the first quarter of next century, merely to keep abreast of the tide of young adults entering the workforce. 9/

19. There is a close link between food security, sustainable agriculture and population growth. Rapid population growth tends to decrease labor productivity in agriculture. A recent case study shows that a 10 per cent reduction in farm size due to population growth results in a 3.6 per cent decrease in labor productivity. 10/ Excessive population growth also reduces the pace of transformation of the economy from a traditional agriculture economy to a surplus food production and industrial economy, and hence discourages growth in per capita income, in food intake, and in nutritional status.

20. Between now and 2025, adequate food, shelter, services and jobs will have to be provided to 7 or 8 billion people who will be living in the developing world, thus challenging the ability of governments to satisfy the basic needs of their population without irreparably damaging the natural resource-base of

their countries. The enormity and urgency of the tasks ahead are underscored by these population projections, the recognized linkages between population factors, environmental conditions, and all aspects of socio-economic development. A constant stream of warning is also found in declarations and statements: the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade; the Declaration of the Eighteenth Special Session of the General Assembly and the Second UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries. This view is increasingly shared by many of the scientific, 11/ the business 12/ and the NGO communities 13/ of both developing and industrialized countries. The Report of the South Commission states: "In sum, a strong committment to slowing down population growth through integrated population and human resource planning can bring large personal and social benefits in most developing countries. High priority for the improvement of child survival rates, expansion of female education, improvement in the economic and social position of women, and the rapid extension of family planning services are the key strategic elements". 14/

NGO perspectives

21. In the framework of a workshop organized by UNDP, some NGOs have expressed their concerns about poverty. They share a broad view of poverty encompassing the loss of cultural identity, traditional knowledge and practices. For most NGOs, inequitable distribution of benefits, the international economy and aid system, inappropriate investments and technologies (growth-oriented, mega-projects) have contributed to destroy people's livelihoods and environment. They also note that poverty is related to the fragility of democratic processes, local communities having only a marginal role within their national political structures. 1/

22. These NGOs advocate a new set of policies to tackle poverty and environmental degradation that would empower the people in order that they identify their own problems and design their own solutions. They also recommend local solutions adapted to specific ecosystems and cultural values, and propose to focus on small-scale and locally centered subsistence economies. The role of the NGOs is therefore to help the poor in this process. NGOs are aware that no one has a monopoly on the solutions to poverty and environmental issues. However, their experience at the local level gives them a legitimate say in the design of policies. This places new demands on their ability to articulate coherent and workable alternatives.

OPTIONS FOR AGENDA 21

23. A major dividing line falls between the countries experiencing positive development where the economy is improving, per capita income and food production are growing, and people are becoming better-off, and the countries that are becoming poorer, with decreasing per capita food production and a deteriorating resource base. The latter are caught often in the vicious circle of a declining economy, increasing population and environmental degradation. Strategies to tackle poverty should embrace all three dimensions of the problem.

24. Four major objectives must be reconciled: alleviate poverty and re-establish human dignity; improve equality of opportunities between people

and nations to prevent waste of human creativity and potential; allow all groups of people to live in harmony with their cultural and spiritual values, with a sense of responsibility towards nature, other populations and future generations; ensure that human numbers and activities are compatible with the resources of the earth, and that they do not overtax the resilience of nature. At the international level, policies to tackle poverty must be rooted in a more balanced economic system; at the national level, they must combine growth with equity in macro policies and planning. There should not be any contradiction between policies that promote development, that improve the livelihood of the poor and that protect the environment.

25. This paper does not deal with the broader macro-economic context of poverty. It focuses on specific measures that seek to tackle the problem of poverty directly. These measures cover four broad programme areas: promoting sustainable livelihoods, ensuring sustainability between population and resources, developing human resources and ensuring a habitable living environment for the poor. The latter two, though listed here are covered more extensively in the Options for Agenda 21 presented in the documents on:

(a) HEALTH (A/CONF.151/PC/54)

(b) ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (A/CONF.151/PC/55)

(c) HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (A/CONF.151/PC/56)

26. Programmatic measures for the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods and poverty redressal have to be seen in the context of the option for action dealt with under land, freshwater, forests and oceans.

A. PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Basis for action

27. An environmental policy that focuses mainly on the conservation and protection of resources without regard to the livelihoods of those who depend on that resource for living will have an adverse impact on poverty. Equally, development policy which focuses mainly on increasing the production of goods without concerning itself with the long-term potential of the resources on which production is based will sooner or later run into problems of declining productivity which also will impact adversely on poverty. An effective strategy to tackle problems of poverty, development and environment simultaneously in developing countries should begin with focus not on resources or on production but on people. The objective of providing sustainable livelihoods for all could provide an integrating factor which allows policies to address issues of resource management, development and poverty eradication simultaneously.

Objectives

28. The promotion of sustainable livelihoods has to become a part of the mainstream of growth and development strategy. The target group orientation of anti-poverty programmes and the resource management dimensions of area

development programmes must be combined into an integrated programme that simultaneously addresses both sets of issues. The objectives of such an integrated programme would be:

1. The generation of remunerative employment and productive occupational opportunities (farm and non-farm) on a scale sufficient to take care of prospective increases in the labour force and to cover backlogs from the past;

2. The development of infrastructure, marketing systems, technology systems, credit systems, etc., to support this as also to ensure a widening of options for resource poor households;

3. Substantial increases in resource productivity and measures to ensure that the local population benefits in adequate measures from resource use;

4. Rehabilitation of degraded resources and policy measures to prevent unsustainable resource use;

5. Development of mechanisms for public participation, particularly by poor households, to ensure sustainable development.

29. Specific targets to reflect the above objectives would have to be articulated in terms of the coverage of poverty groups as well as coverage of ecologically vulnerable areas. The Preparatory Committee may wish to consider the following options:

- All households below the poverty line to be provided with an opportunity to earn a sustainable livelihood by the year 2000.

- All ecologically vulnerable areas, to be covered by integrated programmes of resource management, poverty redressal and employment generation by the year 1995.

Programme Activities

30. The programme activities that would contribute to the promotion of sustainable livelihoods would cover a wide range of sectoral interventions. In its general design, this program should be regional as well as country specific. It should also be geographically and ecologically specific, taking into consideration the physical characteristics of the ecosystem concerned. It should be aimed at specific target groups such as the poor smallholders or landless households, women, indigenous communities, migrants and refugees. The programme should contain immediate measures to alleviate poverty as well as a long-term strategy aiming at establishing the best conditions possible for a sustainable national development that would eliminate poverty, reduce the inequalities between the various groups of the population while improving the overall socio-economic conditions of all people. The focus here is on specific measures that cut across sectors and focus on target groups and target areas. In what follows these are described first followed by a description of activities that would widen options for poor households and reduce vulnerability.

Target Groups

31. Among the poor, it is possible to distinguish a great number of sub-groups representing various forms and degrees of destitution. At the bottom of the ladder we find those who have nothing, those who are completely destitute; then we find those who have a small piece of land or a small property but live in a precarious social, environmental and financial position. Next, we have people who can manage in normal periods but who do not have enough resources to face a personal crisis or unexpected situations like drought, flood or any other dramatic event. Some are vulnerable all the time such as refugees, some are so only under certain circumstances like structural adjustment periods, while others need occasional help during critical phases of their life, for example on marriage or when first settling on a farm. The programme aiming at achieving sustainable livelihoods should address these specific situations and needs in an appropriate manner.

32. Those who are at the very bottom of the economic ladder are defined as those who spend 80 per cent of their income on food but still lack sufficient calories to meet their metabolic needs. This group accounts for perhaps one-third of the absolute poor. They need direct and immediate assistance just to survive. Women, indigenous communities and those who are left out by the processes of development should receive special attention. Whenever possible, help should come in the form of access to resources and jobs because subsidies tend to deprive people of skills, and ultimately, productive employment appears to be a better way of achieving long-term food security and restoring human dignity.

33. As environmental degradation deprives women and their families of important natural resources, their position becomes increasingly difficult. In many countries, particularly in the African region, women are the most involved in cultivation of food crops, in fuelwood, water and fodder collection, in addition to their responsibilities in rearing the children. They are major potential partners in conservation action programmes and should be provided with appropriate training and information in order to play fully their roles as agents for change. The division of labour by gender, the different roles played by men and women in the economy and the specific socio-economic constraints faced by women should be taken into account in programmes aiming at preserving the environment. Anti-poverty programmes should pay attention to women's special needs for remunerative activities, control of income, training and technologies both to ease their burden and to increase the productivity of their work. Sustainable livelihoods programmes should promote equality between women and men in access to property and credit, and in all other rights.

34. There are some 5,000 different indigenous peoples in the world, totalling about 300 million (4.8 per cent of the world population), living in around 70 different countries. Their lands and territorial basis worldwide are increasingly under threat because of rapid penetration of logging, ranching and mining enterprises, the growing pressure of migrants searching for farmland, large-scale government development programmes, agricultural modernization and huge hydroelectric projects. Often, they have been displaced from their original communities to regions with different ecological conditions. Although certain countries have recognized indigenous customary

rights and restricted land alienation through special forms of land ownership under the control of the state, these provisions have been insufficient or have remained largely ineffective. Since land is the main source of subsistence and the core of the spiritual values for most indigenous people, the loss of control over their traditional territories severely affects their livelihood and culture. Sustainable livelihoods programmes should address this central issue in its full dimension.

35. The most notable change in international migration during recent years has been the rapid increase in the number of refugees. In addition to people with refugee status, perhaps another 15 million people are displaced within their own countries. The phenomenon derives from civil or armed conflicts, population growth and environmental run-down, leading to an extreme degree of human deprivation. Among the least developed countries, refugee movements are the main type of recorded international migration flow. Developing countries often play a dual role, as both origin and destination of refugees. Refugees have to be treated explicitly as a target group in designing sustainable livelihood programmes.

Target Areas

36. In order to achieve sustainable livelihoods for all groups of people and especially for the most vulnerable ones living in ecologically endangered areas, operational strategies that consider the very specific characteristics of the ecosystem on which the target group live are required. The ecosystem strategy can provide a satisfactory approach if it also addresses the problems of sustainability through their social, demographic and cultural determinants, and through the existing institutional constraints.

37. In principle, all areas in the developing country should be covered with such integrated programmes for promoting sustainable livelihoods. However, in practice, this would remain a long-term objective and some specification of priority areas where action would have to begin immediately is necessary. In addition, it is also important to identify categories of areas where taking an integrated view of the local ecosystem in relation to the needs that people have for sustenance and livelihood is critical. This means that the focus has to be first in those areas where it is the deterioration or low productivity of the resource base which is the primary constraint on the widening of options for poor households.

38. The primary criteria for the identification of target areas must be specific indicators of the incidence of poverty and of environmental stress. A prioritized specification of the types of areas where poverty and environmental stress would tend to be high as measured by the indicators is difficult. However, it would appear that such areas would include for instance desert and drought prone areas, certain types of coastal areas, mountain environments, urban slums, areas in and around degraded forest lands, flood plains of large river systems particularly those with a big amplitude between big and low season flow. Such a preliminary identification may be useful for purposes of designing the diagnostic surveys should be necessary as a first step in programme specification. However, the real need is for identifying areas in terms of an objective set of indicators.

Income, Employment and Assets for the Poor

39. In order to raise incomes, more sources of gainful employment within and outside agriculture must be created for the poor. In already over-exploited areas, off-farm employment must be promoted such as food processing, labour-intensive rural works, trading, cottage and other industries. Absorption of labour in non-farm activities is essential for raising labour productivity and incomes in agriculture. It would also lessen the pressure on vulnerable areas and contribute to environmental objectives and sustainable agriculture. The major actions proposed by FAO and spelled out in the Den Bosch Declaration are very relevant in this context (see A/CONF.151/PC/61).

40. In terms of economic security, what different classes own is as important as what they earn. Although reliable information is exceedingly scarce, the disparity in the distribution of wealth appears to be wider than the disparity in the distribution of income. Landlessness is widespread in many developing countries. It reflects the lack-of-work issue and the lack-of-land issue, both exacerbated by inadequate socio-economic infrastructure and an inadequate natural resource base, in the face of unprecedented population growth. Both issues lead to increasing numbers of marginal people with no alternative but to migrate to cities or to marginal environments. The typical poor person is no longer a subsistence farmer but a dispossessed laborer. One observer notes that in 1981, the number of landless rural households in the world has been estimated at 167 million - numbering 938 million people - and is expected to rise to 220 million households by the turn of this century. 3/

41. In order to improve access to productive resources, land tenure systems and land property rights must be reviewed. Poor people's control over trees is particularly neglected. Trees are also economic assets that provide a flow of benefits such as fruit, fodder, shade, soil regeneration, construction materials and fuel. Like other assets, they can be sold in times of need, a use growing in importance as the poor lose their traditional safety nets and become more vulnerable. 3/

42. Credit is crucial to enable the poor to accumulate assets and to undertake measures to protect the environment. Innovative approaches drawing on informal financing systems and group credit approaches could be developed. However, the programmes undertaken so far have generally not been successful in extending credit to significant numbers of poor, repayment rates have been low. Interesting schemes have been developed for very low income people (eg. the GRAMEEN Bank in Bangladesh) which should be examined and replicated.

43. The measures required to tackle urban poverty are qualitatively different. The issue here is not necessarily one of asset redistribution or resource rehabilitation though that is an important role in a few specialised contexts. The principal requirement as far as urban poverty is concerned, is to increase the rate of growth of non-agricultural employment (including self-employment) and even more important, protect and enhance earnings from such employment particularly in the informal sector. The interventions required for this purpose relate mainly to measures which recognise the role of the informal sector in providing opportunities to the urban poor in creating the support system often through NGOs to ensure minimum wages and acceptable conditions of work for employees in the informal sector, to provide

the self-employed with assistance in input supply, marketing and credit and to integrate the activities of the informal sector into the mainstream of economic and physical planning in urban areas. Certain categories of informal sector work has very intimate links with environmental management of urban areas. Many informal sector workers are involved in reprocessing of materials which would otherwise become waste. These activities, if supported adequately would provide not merely an avenue of employment to the poor but also facilitate the environmentally important task of recycling.

Resource Management for Income Growth

44. Sustainable livelihood programmes would be particularly important in areas which are environmentally stressed. Hence, apart from the household oriented interventions directed at poverty redressal and employment creation, it is important to have a set of interventions which are specifically directed at resource management. The basic framework for such resource management has been described at some length in the discussion of the integrated management of land resources in A/CONF.151/PC/63 and also in the options for Agenda 21 for land, freshwater, oceans and forests. The specific requirement in the context of sustainable livelihood projects or programmes is to ensure that such resource management measures take place in a manner which allows them to be integrated fully with the household oriented effort at poverty redressal and employment generation which has been described above.

45. In rural areas, the basic approach would be to identify the production and employment potential of a region which can be sustained without causing any deterioration of resources, and in fact, with some significant component of resource enhancement. It also requires that attention be focused not merely on the availability of the resource, but how access to that resource is distributed amongst the people who depend on it for a livelihood. Resource use should be looked at and planned as a system so that field crops, tree crops, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and all allied activities are looked at as an integrated set of activities. Moreover, the balance between resources and people in a region may also require special measures for the promotion of non land-based activities in small industry services, etc.

Ensuring Food Security

46. Food security has been defined by FAO as the physical and economic access, by all people and at all times, to the basic food they need. For IFAD, food security is basically a question of entitlement to food through means of production and through productive employment. It depends as much on purchasing power and entitlement as on production and supply. Food security is not merely a question of producing more food but ensuring that the poor have access to it: national self-sufficiency in food production does not guarantee by itself the availability of food to the poor. There is a close link between food security, sustainable agriculture and population trends.

47. In order to improve food production, appropriate infrastructure, services and resources, together with environmentally compatible technologies, must be provided to the poor to enable them to increase output without damaging their environment. This is dealt with in the document on Sustainable Agriculture and in the Options for Agenda 21 relating to Land. However, in many

ecologically vulnerable areas, food production is prone to large fluctuations leading to short-term stresses which can reach famine propactions. Effective arrangements for coping with such periods of stress are a crucial component of food security.

48. The stability in the flow of supplies and access to available supplies on the part of those who need them must be achieved. The management of stocks by the state, by the community, by the household and by the traders must be organized in such a way that food is always available at accessible prices at all times and for everybody. The Comité Intergouvernemental pour la Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel notes that population at risk or specific groups at risk within a given population must be identified and followed-up closely if food security for all is to be achieved. Landlocked and remote areas must be made easily accessible by appropriate infrastructure and transportation services.

Action at the International Level

49. The implementation of an integrated programme of the type described above would, of course, require action mainly at the national and local level and the primary function of the international community would be to provide the financial assistance required to enable countries to pursue ambitious programmes for this purpose particularly in ecological disadvantaged areas to create facilitating mechanisms for the exchange of experiences and to ensure a measure of coordination in the flow of assistance for this purpose.

50. The financial assistance provided by bilateral and multilateral donors subserves a variety of purposes. Identifying the proportion that contributes directly to the reduction of poverty is difficult. It is worth noting, however, that in 1988, about 41 per cent of aid was directed to middle and high income countries, and that there are great disparities in per capita allocation of aid. A focus on poverty and sustainable livelihoods requires a commitment to enhance greatly the flow of assistance to low income countries and for projects and programmes directed at development of ecologically stressed areas. The Preparatory Committee may wish to consider recommending that the flow of aid in these specific categories should be at least doubled within a period of five years.

51. An integrated approach to poverty redressal and resource management will require a flexible approach with a long-term horizon focusing on small and location specific solutions. A facilitating mechanism to allow for a systematic review of experiences at the country level and the exchange of such assessments would be of particular value. The Preparatory Committee may wish to consider whether a specific agency could be charged with the responsibility for this purpose.

52. A coordinated approach to poverty redressal involves action not merely on anti-poverty programmes but on a variety of other matters including sectoral programmes on agriculture and land development, urban development, water resource development, small industries, etc. There are also social dimensions involving the role of indigenous communities, the position of women, and so on. A large number of agencies in the UN system would have activities which impinge directly or indirectly on this task. The Preparatory Committee may

wish to consider whether a mechanism should be set up under the Secretary-General of the United Nations so as to coordinate and implement what could be, in effect, a United Nations Plan of Action on Poverty.

53. Food security is the main source of vulnerability for poor households in ecologically stressed regions. The international community could play a major role in developing long-term and predictable arrangements to reduce the risks of stress in food availability and provide emergency assistance quickly when required. Certain components dealing with international assistance for food productions programmes will be addressed in the context of the discussion on Options for Agenda 21 on Land. In the context of this paper, the Preparatory Committee may wish to consider strengthening present arrangements for identification of areas of stress, coordination and financing of assistance, standby capacities by way of stocks, resources and personnel at the international level.

B. REDUCTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURES

Basis for action

54. The present demographic situation and projected trends for the coming decades clearly show that there will be an intensification of the problems associated with rapid population growth such as migration, imbalances in population distribution and rapid urbanization. Countries that are in the process of positive development generally have low population growth rates (2 per cent per year, or lower) while countries trapped in the downward spiral of poverty have a population growth of 3 per cent, or more. Often, these countries also face serious problems of environmental degradation. Population is one of the major development factors where developing countries have a real opportunity for change in a relatively brief period and at a relatively low cost.

Objectives

55. A programme dedicated to tackling at the same time poverty and environmental degradation could have the following objectives:

- intensify population programmes consistent with the socio-cultural milieu of each country;

- achieve an optimal balance between population and resources through improved planning mechanisms at the national level.

Activities related to population programmes

56. A reduction in population growth rates would make it easier to accelerate development and ensure sustainability in many countries. Over half of the developing countries are pursuing active policies towards this end. The International Development Strategy for the fourth United Nations Development Decade suggests that developing countries should "intensify their efforts to allocate adequate resources to population programmes" and also calls for an increase in assistance to developing countries in this area. The plan of action approved by the World Summit for Children states that "all couples

should have access to information on the importance of the responsible planning of family size and the many advantages of child spacing to avoid pregnancies that are too early, too late, too many or too frequent".

57. Measured in terms of money, population programmes are cost-effective. In the case of one African country, the savings induced by its population programme, over a period of 30 years, in the sectors of health, education and agriculture total more than 2 years of its GNP. 15/ Population programmes have to be integrated with economic goals and strategies and the methods used have to take into account the social cultural environment of individual countries. The education of women, improved maternity and child care and family planning services are some of the means that have been used in population programmes. The subject of education and health are dealt with in separate documents and are not developed further here. The focus in what follows is on the last mentioned component. It must be seen as part of a broader programme which addresses the issues of social and human development.

58. Family planning, as an integral part of Maternal and Child Health program contributes to human development in many ways. First, it improves the health of women and thus their working abilities, especially in rural areas where a great part of the physical burden of the agricultural work falls on them. In terms of status, a woman's control over her own fertility is often called "the freedom from which other freedoms flow" and therefore, opportunities beyond marriage and having children are both a practical expression of women's rights. It increases women's ability to make their own decisions in life as well as their potential for earning an income. It improves their access to training and all forms of education. Also, it improves the health and survival of their children and enhances both their physical and intellectual potential. The process of building opportunities and choices consistent with human development begins at birth and cannot be seen separate from the conditions in which women have their offspring.

59. Family planning programmes have to be consistent with the value systems of society and have the support of political and social leaders. In programmatic terms, the aim must be to provide a wide choice of modern, safe and effective methods of contraception, well-trained and highly motivated workers with a sense of their value to the community and a respect for the community's own values. The quality of the services offered and the ability of women and men to take advantage of them also determine the success of the programme. Other complementary activities such as data collection, research and dissemination of information are also critical to achieve this objective.

Activities related to Population/Resources Planning

Population/resources planning mechanisms

60. An increasing number of countries have a Population planning unit integrated into their Ministry of Planning, or other relevant structure. This unit helps improve allocation of public investments and plan new infrastructure in the light of demographic trends. It enables planners to take into consideration the demographic variables affecting development and

the environment. Some countries have already put in place integrated population and resources planning mechanisms with success. Their experience could help design appropriate mechanisms for other countries.

61. In order to improve planning capacities and balance population with available resources to attain the desired stage of development, decision-makers need to understand the complex interactions between population change, socio-economic development and the physical environment of their country. No country in the world has unlimited capacities for action and its development options must be based on a scheme of priorities. A model of such interactions could be developed for every country to help orient development policies. Such a model would serve political authorities as a planning tool that demonstrates the impact of alternative policies and also indicates the feasible pathways towards politically desired goals without compromising other objectives, eg. environment conservation, social welfare, etc. Such a model is under experimentation for Mauritius. 16/

Identification of ecologically endangered zones

62. The poorest often live in fragile ecological zones. In order to assess the present situation and achieve sustainable livelihoods, an ecosystem approach to population and development planning should be adopted. UNFPA has elaborated such a programme featuring three major components: a framework and a methodology to select countries and classify critical ecological areas within the country where population and environment problems are endemic. This approach requires developing cartographic mapping techniques to reveal concentrations of populations that are presently beyond the carrying capacity of local and communal resource bases. The implementation of the programmes would involve major inputs from several ministries as well as inter-agency coordination in the form of financial resources, planning and technical backstopping. Such an initiative should fit into the development priorities of the country, and should build up national capacity in order that the project can be duplicated whenever a need arises in other parts of the country. Among the major fragile areas are forested uplands, coastal fishing areas, lowland areas of smallholder agriculture, arid lands with increasing numbers of grazing animals, tropical forests and urban slums. These activities complement the strategic options for ecosystems described under the sustainable livelihoods programme.

Monitoring of global environmental change and its impact on population

63. Environmental change as well as demographic trends are slow processes, with an underlying momentum. It is important to look ahead, to anticipate the effects of global environmental change in order to take measures beforehand, so as to minimize its possible negative impact on human populations. For example, trends show an increasing concentration of population on coastal zones. By the year 2,000, more than two-thirds of the world population is projected to live within 60 kilometers of the coast, and as many as three-quarters of them will inhabit tropical developing countries. The marine environment is extremely important for food, biological diversity and human activities in general. Given the projected concentration of population along the coasts, it appears that the socio-demographic dimension of coastal vulnerability to global change is a priority and should be fully addressed.

The framework for monitoring both demographic trends and environmental change includes the following socio-demographic components: population growth rates, distribution and migration, health, socio-cultural characteristics and their implications in terms of resource use. Quantitative data must be organized in such a way that they overlap with ecosystem. These activities are a part of a comprehensive assessment of the human dimensions of global environmental change in which various scientific institutions, United Nations bodies and NGOs are involved. 17/

Action at the International Level

64. The activities aimed at reducing demographic pressures have to be undertaken basically at the national level. This requirement is particularly important since many of these would have to be designed in a manner that would vary greatly from country to country and would have to take into account the substantial variations and socio-cultural attitudes and systems of values. Education and health, particularly for those components which are directly related to fertility behaviour like the education of girls, women's access to employment, maternal and child health, are also essential. Population programmes are most effective when linked with other activities aimed at eliminating poverty such as gainful employment, education and other activities listed under the programme of sustainable livelihoods. A coordinated implementation of all these in priority target areas, and among priority target groups, would enhance their results. International assistance also needs to be enhanced:

- for population activities undertaken by the UNFPA and other organizations;

- for population programmes run by countries;

- for the very substantial efforts in this direction being made by NGOs.

65. Given the needs to be covered and the urgency of the task, the Preparatory Committee may wish to consider suggesting that multilateral and bilateral assistance for programme activities in the area of population should be doubled by 1995.

C. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

66. Human dimensions are the core of development. If economic growth is necessary for development, any growth which does not translate into improvement of human life misses the target. The major components of human development are education and health, as well as equity, freedom and, more generally speaking, the capacity of each individual to play an active and creative role in the society.

67. The major objectives and activities to be implemented in the Health and Education sectors are described at length in the corresponding documents prepared for the third session of the Preparatory Committee (see A/CONF.151/PC/54 and 55).

D. THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE POOR

68. Sustainable livelihoods, the balance between population and resources, and human development should take place in an appropriate physical setting characterized by decent habitat and adequate infrastructure if poverty is to be eradicated. Access to clean water, sewage and garbage systems are an important part of the living conditions of the poor and therefore deserve the attention of policy makers. The specific objectives, targets and measures submitted to the Preparatory Committee in this sector will be found in the corresponding documents: Human Settlements, Freshwater, Solid wastes, etc. (see A/CONF.151/PC/56).

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